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THE RAGTIMER

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PRESERVATION OF
CLASSICAL RAGTIME

SOCIETY REPRINT SHEET MUSIC

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RAGTIME...
UNDER YOUR HAT

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THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
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is a non-profit corporation having the following objects;

To preserve classical ragtime music and to pursue such other activities as shall serve to maintain and develop interest in classical ragtime music and music related thereto.

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1981

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Letters -- we've been getting letters and we want you to know that we have appreciated every one of them. Some wrote in response to receiving the first two issues of this year. Others wrote to commiserate over the postal disruption and other communications problems. Others submitted articles, and others simply wrote to maintain an important ragtime contact.

The idea of celebrating our 20th anniversary next year -- imagine, 20 unbroken years! -- has excited some of you, according to the letters. We're going to share some of the ideas with you later, and see what you think.

You will notice that we have combined two issues in one in order to be entirely caught up in our publishing schedule at the end of this year. That is also why the final two issues of the year will also be combined into one so people who attend the Ragtime Bash in October will have a chance to see themselves soon after the event, and everyone who misses it will see what a great party they missed.

In the meantime, it's not too late to share your ideas about our 20th anniversary. Pick up your pen and use the address on the bottom of this page.

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It's easy to spot the brand-new ragtimer. He's the one on the other side of the music store, staring in horror at a folio of ragtime compositions, flipping page after page of dotted eighth notes that to him bear a frightening resemblance to fly paper. The supercilious reaction from the sales clerk a few moments ago didn't help, nor did the stare from the adenoidal girl whose music teacher told her last week that ragtime is noisy honky-tonk. Behind the sweating brow, the thoughts are easy to read. The decision to try ragtime two days ago sounded good then but is rapidly cooling. It's no longer a question of where to start. He's now wondering *whether* to start.

The dilemma of the novice ragtimer is what this Ragtimer issue is all about.

Jack Hutton

WE WROTE TO SEVERAL RAGTIMERS ACROSS THE CONTINENT AND ASKED THEM TO SUBMIT A LIST OF 10 RAGTIME COMPOSITIONS THAT A RAGTIME NOVITIATE COULD USE AS GOALS FOR A SUITABLE REPERTOIRE.

IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, YOU'LL SHARE THE REACTIONS OF TEX WYNDHAM, DAVID JASEN, DICK ZIMMERMAN AND DICK HYMAN TO OUR ECCENTRIC REQUEST. WE'RE GRATEFUL TO ALL OF THEM, AND TRUST THAT YOU'LL FIND WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY AS INTERESTING AS WE DID. HOW MANY OF THESE TUNES ARE IN YOUR PIANO BENCH?

TEX WYNDHAM: "Won't this confuse the beginner?"

Tex Wyndham, a familiar talent to ragtimers all across North America -- both through his personal style of reviewing and his keyboard abilities -- provided a caution with his list of 10 tunes: "I'd think publishing several such lists would defeat the purpose of the article by confusing the poor beginner who still won't know what to believe. It's obviously simple for a knowledgeable ragtimer to come up with more than 10 easy hits. The publication of, say, 10 short lists of 10 rags each is probably going to cover some 50 titles -- maybe too much of an initial investment. So where do you start and whom do you believe? Those are my thoughts on it. However, so as not to be negative, I've complied with your request..."

Tex recommends

1 -- SOMETHING DOING (Scott Joplin and Scott Hayden)
Available (a) (d) (e) SEE BELOW

2 -- CALLIOPE RAG (James Scott)
Available (g)

3 -- REINDEER RAG (Joseph Lamb)
Available (a) (e) (f)

4 -- TAR BABIES (Charles L. Johnson)
Available (b) (c)

5 -- BLACK AND WHITE RAG (George Botsford)
Available (c) (d)

6 -- THE BOWERY BUCK (Tom Turpin)
Available (a)

7 -- THE SMILER (Percy Wenrich)
Available (a)

8 -- WHISTLING RUFUS (Kerry Mills)
Available (b)

9 -- MISSISSIPPI RAG (William H. Krell)
Available (e) (f)

10 -- RIVERSIDE RAG (Charles Cohen)
Available (d)

Honorable Mention: CAR-BARLICK HUD (Clarence Wiley)
Available (h)

Tex's comments: "This list gives the beginner a respectable and enjoyable repertoire to play for others or for one's own amusement. It embraces "The Big Three", five other composers whose works are generally worthy but not excessively demanding, the first published piano solo calling itself a rag (EDITOR: Mississippi Rag) and a cheerful relative obscurity."

Published in:

(a) Classic Piano Rags collected by Rudi Blesh (Dover Publishing)

(b) A Tribute To Scott Joplin And The Giants of Ragtime collected by Dick Zimmerman, published by Charles Hansen.

(c) Ragtime: 100 Authentic Rags collected by David A. Jasen, published by Big 3.

(d) Play Them Rags, published by Belwin Mills

(e) A Golden Encyclopedia of Ragtime, published by Charles Hansen.

(f) The Best of Ragtime Favorites and How to Play Them, published by Charles Hansen.

(g) They All Played Ragtime, by Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis (4th edition, Oak Publications)

(h) Ragtime Rarities, collected by Trebor Tichenor (Dover Publications)

DAVID JASEN: "Ragtime isn't cheese!"

David Jasen must be the ragtimer's equivalent of a Renaissance man: performer, composer, scholar, lecturer, reviewer ... the list seems endless in describing the man from Flushing, New York. He's also blunt in a way that never gives offence, which is why we enjoy sharing his response to our letter.

"I think the idea stinks.

"Ragtime isn't a piece of cheese. Ragtime is a word embracing several quite distinct musical atmospheres. Stride ragtime, for instance, is quite different from folk ragtime. Joplin's ragtime has nothing in common with (Zez) Confrey's.

"Ragtime, being an art form, needs to be dealt with in a different manner from choosing a toothpaste. But maybe there's a similarity in that you choose a toothpaste by its taste to you. And I suggest that you (the beginner) learn rags which appeal emotionally to you. Since we all have different responses, it is an individual matter to consider.

"Certainly, from a practical standpoint, stride and novelty would never be recommended to a beginner (On the other hand, I was only 12½ when I learned Kitten on the Keys. It took me three months to play it properly and up to a reasonable tempo)

"For a beginner, practically any Tin Pan Alley or popular rag (those written between 1906-1912) should suffice. They're usually melodic and have less complex rhythms and predictable orthodox harmonies.

"My folio, RAGTIME: 100 ORIGINAL RAGS (The Big 3) has some of every ragtime style and things of interest to amuse all pianists from the beginner to the most advanced performer (Dick Hyman loved learning the novelty rags of Artie Shutt). The other virtue of this folio is that it can be found or ordered from any music store. The Big 3 is the second largest music publisher in the U.S. with distribution everywhere.

"What might be fun would be to ask a selected list of ragtimers what their 10 favorite rags were (not necessarily their 10 favorites to play, but to enjoy) and why if they felt a comment was needed. This will show individual tastes. But you can't have much scope with a list of rags for beginners. Even Maple Leaf Rag would prove a hardship whereas Dill Pickles and Black and White are the easy winners.

"If a pianist is highly motivated, he'll drive himself to learn the type of rag he loves, despite technical limitations. Which is why the idea stinks, in my opinion."

EDITOR -- Many thanks to David because here's what he told us:

-- The beginner shouldn't be ashamed of playing and enjoying the simpler rags that were published by Tin Pan Alley and others circa 1906-1912.

-- Develop your own tastes about what you like and don't be dominated by others who tell you what you should like.

-- A good source to sample many different styles of ragtime is David's justly-lauded folio RAGTIME: 100 ORIGINAL RAGS.

-- Black And White Rag by George Botsford and Dill Pickles by Charles J. Johnson are two obvious choices for the beginner.

-- Maple Leaf Rag shouldn't be at the top of a beginner's list.

-- Don't even consider stride or novelty rags until you're confident with a basic repertoire.

DICK HYMAN names four Joplin tunes

Dick Hyman didn't have a fair chance to consider his responses to our question because it was put to him as part of the interview which appeared in the last issue of the Ragtimer (March-April, 1981). Therefore, he didn't attempt a full list of 10 and restricted his comments to his Joplin favorites.

1 -- MAPLE LEAF RAG (Scott Joplin)
Dick's comments: "You can probably understand why I have personally grown a bit tired of the tune (after recording it many times for both film and records). But, at the same time, it is the one Joplin tune that any ragtime pianist would eventually want to have in his or her repertoire."

2 -- SOLACE (Scott Joplin)
"This is undoubtedly a beautiful tune which rewards you more the longer you play it. It's not that difficult to play, but I've found that I have really got inside the tune and like it very much."

3 -- HELIOTROPE BOUQUET (Scott Joplin)
"The same applies to this Joplin tune."

4 -- PALM LEAF RAG (Scott Joplin)
"This certainly isn't one of Joplin's tunes that you think of immediately, but it wound up as one of my favorites after I'd recorded his full works. I'd recommend it to anyone."

DICK ZIMMERMAN: "Don't try too much too quickly"

Dick Zimmerman's advice comes from a man whose ragtime talents defy cataloguing. He is a Joplin scholar who has recorded not only the full Joplin standard works but also Tremonisha; he edits the excellent Rag Times for the Maple Leaf Club; he both reviews and writes about ragtime; and he is a frequent concert performer. Here's what he said as a preface to his list of 10 which, incidentally, provide a syllabus for any beginning ragtimer who is willing to start with the first tune (Scott Joplin would add a caution: "Go slow.") "I feel that one reason so many beginners have such a hard time with rags is that they try to do too much too soon. If Maple Leaf Rag is the first thing you tackle, the going can get very rough. I would suggest starting with easy pieces, and work up to the harder ones. The following rags were chosen because they are among the best of their kind, people request them, and most ragtimers play them, which makes playing duets possible. They also introduce a novice to a variety of ragtime styles."

1 -- DILL PICKLES (Charles L. Johnson)

Dick's comments: "This ragtime tune is easy to read and fun to play. It's a good way to start reading ragtime syncopation."

2 -- AT A GEORGIA CAMP MEETING (Kerry Mills)

Dick's comments: "THis is probably a cakewalk rather than a true rag. But its easy key and light scoring, plus its catchy melody, make it a good early piece to learn."

3 -- THE ENTERTAINER (Scott Joplin)

Dick's comments: "Learn the original version. It's still one of Joplin's best and the one the public always requests."

4 -- HARLEM RAG (Tom Turpin)

Dick's comments: "This is also easy but quite exciting. Learn the De Lisle arrangement which is reprinted in Classic Piano Rags and in Mississippi Valley Rags."

5 -- BLACK AND WHITE RAG (George Botsford)

Dick's comments: "THis is easy to read but requires practice to play smoothly. It's a good way to develop technique."

6 -- PICKLES AND PEPPERS (Adeline Shepherd)

Dick's comments: "This is a favorite of many ragtimers and a nice transition into reading in A flat."

7 -- GRACE AND BEAUTY (James Scott)

Dick's comments: "THis is one of the best classic rags."

8 -- MAPLE LEAF RAG (Scott Joplin)

"By now, this should not seem much harder than Grace and Beauty. But learn it exactly as written before trying your own improvisations."

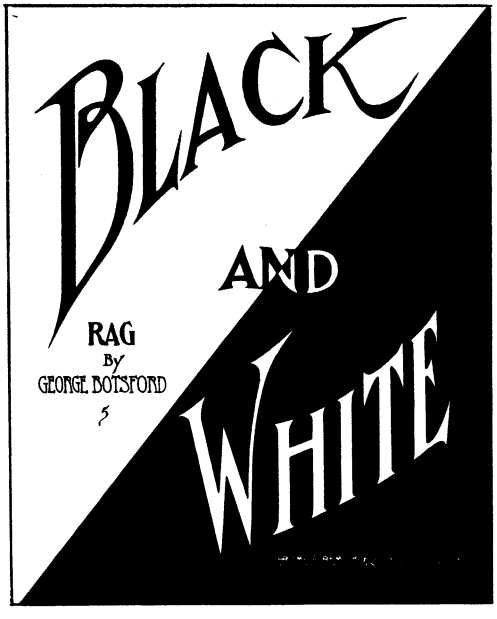
9 -- TOPLINER RAG (Joseph Lamb)

Dick's comments: "You will now know one rag by each of the "Big Three". Topliner is one of the very best."

10 -- KITTEN ON THE KEYS (Zez Confrey)

Dick's comments: "This introduces you to many later forms and prepares you to attempt with confidence just about any rag. It, too, is a classic of its type."

Dick's final comment: "All of these rags will repay the pianist for the hours spent in learning them and will never grow stale or out-of-date."



HERE'S THE POPULAR CHOICE!

Did you notice that George Botsford's perennial favorite was the ragtime composition mentioned by most? But, after that, agreement went right out the window!

If you take strong exception to any of the choices or comments, the first cheer you hear will be from your Ragtimer editor. Sit down before emotion has cooled and tell us which compositions were outrageously omitted. Which school of ragtime did not even receive lip service?

We'll be happy to carry your comments because -- as we've been trying to say -- this is your publication.

RECORD REVIEW

by
TEX
WYNDHAM

Folkways RBF 42 "Ragtime Piano Novelties of the 20's", compiled and annotated by David A. Jasen.

Selections and Artists: Slipova - Patricia Rossborough, The Cat's Pajamas - Harry Jentes, Monkey Business - Sid Reinherz, Pianoflage - Henry W. Lange, Ragman's Exercise - Stanley C. Holt, Nickel in the Slot - Frank Herbin, Hot Piano - Jean Pacques, Nola - Harry Parella and Ray Turner, The Doll Dance - Pauline Alpert, Rag Doll - Billy Mayerl, Dizzy Keys - Jay Wilburn, Out of The South - Willard Robison, Scale It Down - Walker O'Neill, Dustin' The Keys - Cecil Norman, Polly - Al Siegel, Dancing Dolls - Jack Wilson.

Available @ $8.98 from Folkways Records, 43 W. 61st Street, New York City, New York 10023.

As novelty rags are designed to do, this collection of 15 vintage solos and one duet concentrates on spotlighting the performers' virtuosity -- and a tremendously skilled bunch they are from the most famous (probably Billy Mayerl, whose classy approach to "Rag Doll" almost, but not quite, masks the exceptional difficulty of what he is playing) to the completely forgotten (several ticklers on RBF 42 vie for that dubious honour, with Jay Wilbur's hot, hard-hitting "Dizzy Keys" offering a typical example of how good your relatively unknown regional professional might have been). Performances run from meteoric (Patricia Rossborough's dazzling rush across Bargy's "Slipova" gives you little chance to appreciate the composition, but overwhelms you with her keyboard command) through sturdy (Harry Jentes' comfortable inviting ride on his "The Cat's Pyjamas", fleshed out with jazzy fills) to one rather stodgy track (Stanley C. Holt's somewhat stiff and boring version of the poorly-titled, not-very-raggedy "Ragman's Exercise"). I would probably give the cutting-contest ribbon to Pauline Alpert, whose superb charg of "The Doll Dance" is not only flawlessly performed but also contains tasty and fertile variations on the score, yet she'd get hard competition from the fireworks emanating from Al Siegel (blazing version of "Polly" enhanced by the insertion of a boiling trio-like strain), Harry Parella and Ray Turner (double-timing the last half of "Nola", they jump all over the treble with intricate music-boxy four-handed work) and Willard Robison (driving, assured tickling that'll break your thermometer). Fidelity of rare 78s from the 1920's is not, of course, going to be the same as 1980 hi-fi, but re-mastering here sounds fine to me, completing an attractive package for novelty piano buffs.

Euphonic ESR 1221 "The Neglected Professor", piano solos by Charlie Thompson.

Selections: The Lily Rag #1, St. Louis Blues, Twelfth Street Rag, The Dream, Chimes Blues, The One I Love, Leola, Delmar Blues, The Lily Rag #2, Delmar Rag, When Sambo Goes to France, Maori, Five Foot Two, Lingering Blues, Derby Stomp, Dictys On 7th Avenue, Brother-in-Law Dan, Centennial Rag

Available @ $7.95 plus $1.00 postage from Euphonic Sound Recording Co., 357 Leighton Drive, Ventura, California 93001

Charles Thompson, whose "Lily Rag" was published in 1914 by St. Louis' Syndicate Music Company and who won a big-league piano competition in that city a few years later (leading to a match in which he bested Tom Turpin), was pretty much overlooked in the early ragtime revival, having been given only one studio recording session (for Stereoddities in 1960, the discs now long deleted). Thus the appearance of this LP of casual Thompson solo in living-room parties (well enough recorded, although the pianos are on the thunky side) is, despite the brevity and and consequent lack of development of several titles, an event of considerable importance to dedicated ragtimers. Thompson turns out to be an accomplished and attractive tickler, featuring two-fisted Harlemish licks he picked up at some point and a powerful piano-roll-type left hand, showing himself to best advantage on several fine blues (Thompson's "Chime Blues"-- not the jazz tune by that name -- grinds out seven choruses effectively blending earthy figures with raggy stride, and "Derby Stomp" is a flashy, hot 8 choruses of busy 12-bar blues) and to pretty good advantage on the rags, of which Thompson only plays a loose, semi-improvised strain or two (except for his own multi-theme works -- and "Delmar Rag" is a superb example thereof, the equal of "Lily" in ear-catching drive). The remaining half-dozen-or-so tracks are pretty sketchy, but not without interest (particularly the fertile second chorus of "Five Feet Two"), filling out an album that most readers of this column should consider essential for historical reasons and sufficiently rewarding musically as well.

Folkways RBF 43 "The Piano Roll Artistry of Max Kortlander", compiled and annotated by David A. Jasen.

Selections: Blue Clover Man, No No Nora, Deuces Wild, Has Anybody Seen My Corinne? , American Beauty Rag, Dear Old Daddy Long Legs*, Derby Day, In Dixie, Shim Me Sha Wobble, Climax Rag, Let's Try It, Bo La Bo, Hunting The Ball, Ida! Sweet As Apple Cider, Bigamous Blues, Triangle Jazz Blues, Funeral Rag, Chicago, Russian Rag.

* Duet roll by Kortlander and Zez Confrey.

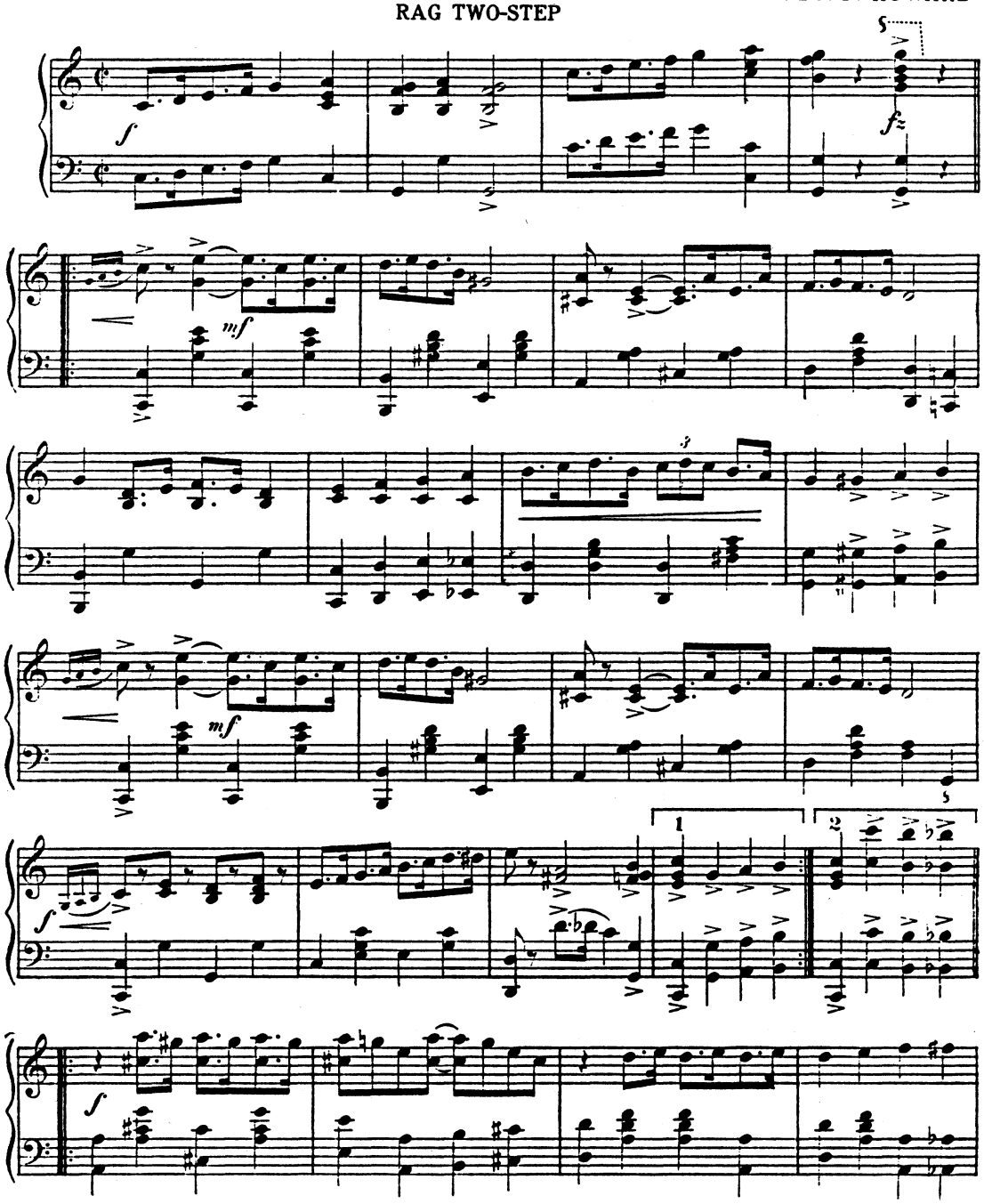
Available @ $8.98 from Folkways Records, 43 W 61st Street, New York City, New York 10023.

These 18 vintage piano rolls, recorded in adequate if uneven fidelity, put into focus the prodigious talent at arranging material for player pianos possessed by Max Kortlander, initially a staff pianist and eventually the owner of Q.R.S. Music Company, the leading roll producer from the ragtime years down to contemporary times. Popular piano rolls compensate for their lack of subtlety with an irresistible power and optimism that doesn't change much from track to track, especially when there are so many numbers taken at the same bright tempo, but there is nothing repetitive about the flood of inventive pianistic ideas bursting from Kortlander into the settings for the seven pop tunes on the bill -- utilizing the full resources of the mechanical instrument to paint florid, rococo patterns (naturally beyond the grasp of a human pianist) behind the melodies. Kortlander closes out "Ida! Sweet As Apple Cider" with a faster-than-light chorus of across-the-keyboard fireworks; increases the density on "No No Nora" in ever-more-exciting fashion; crams noveltyish fills around the extended melody notes of "Derby Day In Dixie"; and propels "Chicago" through such an inviting chart that even a cadaver would be compelled to sing along. The remainder of the program consists of rags, six by Kortlander (mostly enjoyable strings of complex noveltyish figures, but also including a smeary, gutsy "Bigamous Blue" and a perfunctory ragged version of Chopin's "Funeral March" entitled "Funeral Rag") and five in a more classic style (which Kortlander tends to over-decorate into ponderousness). A must for rollophiles and attractive enough for ragtime archaeologists as well.

Dedicated to Irving C. Perkins

"SAM FOX TROT"

RAG TWO-STEP

GEO. P. HOWARD

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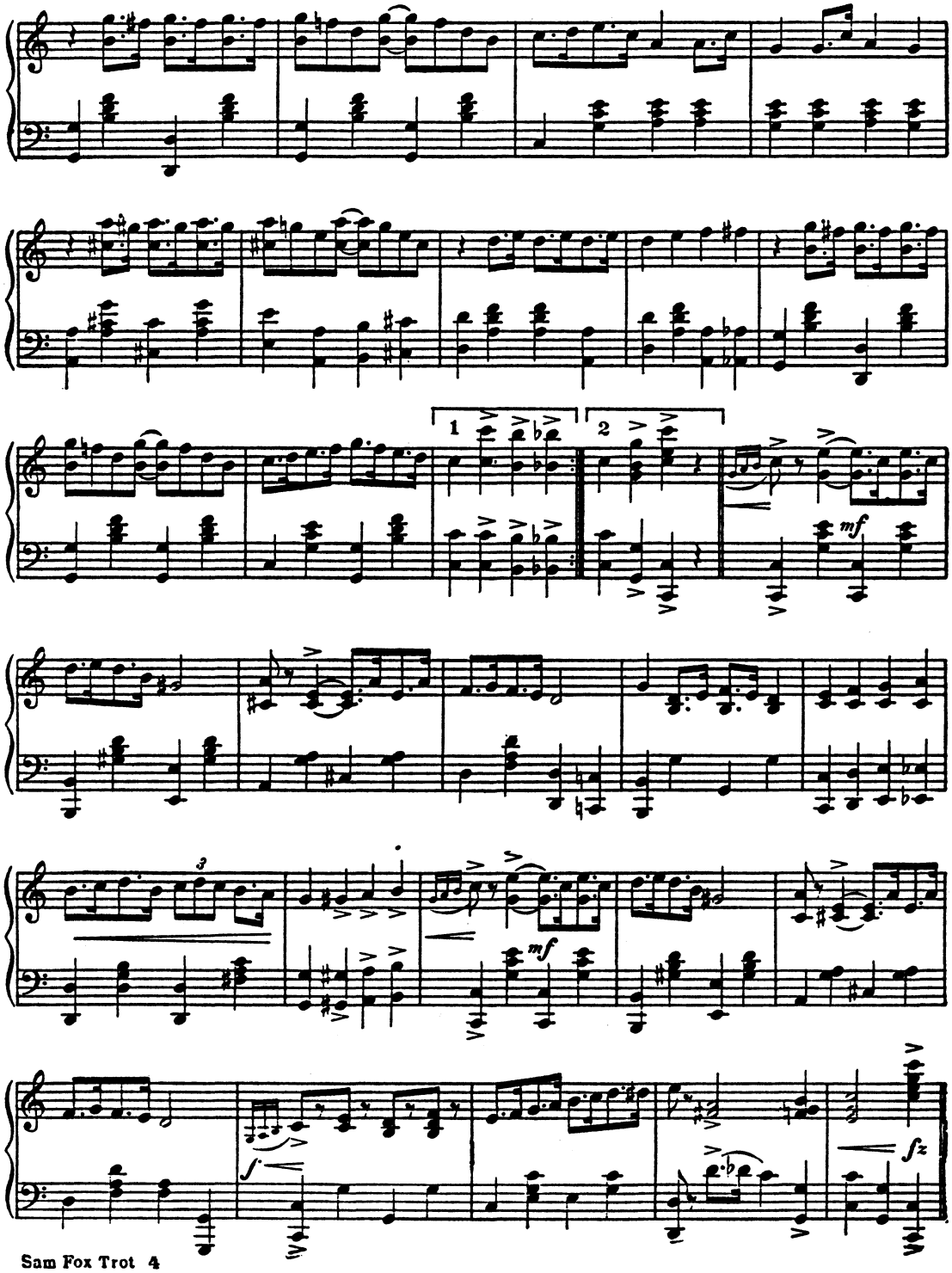
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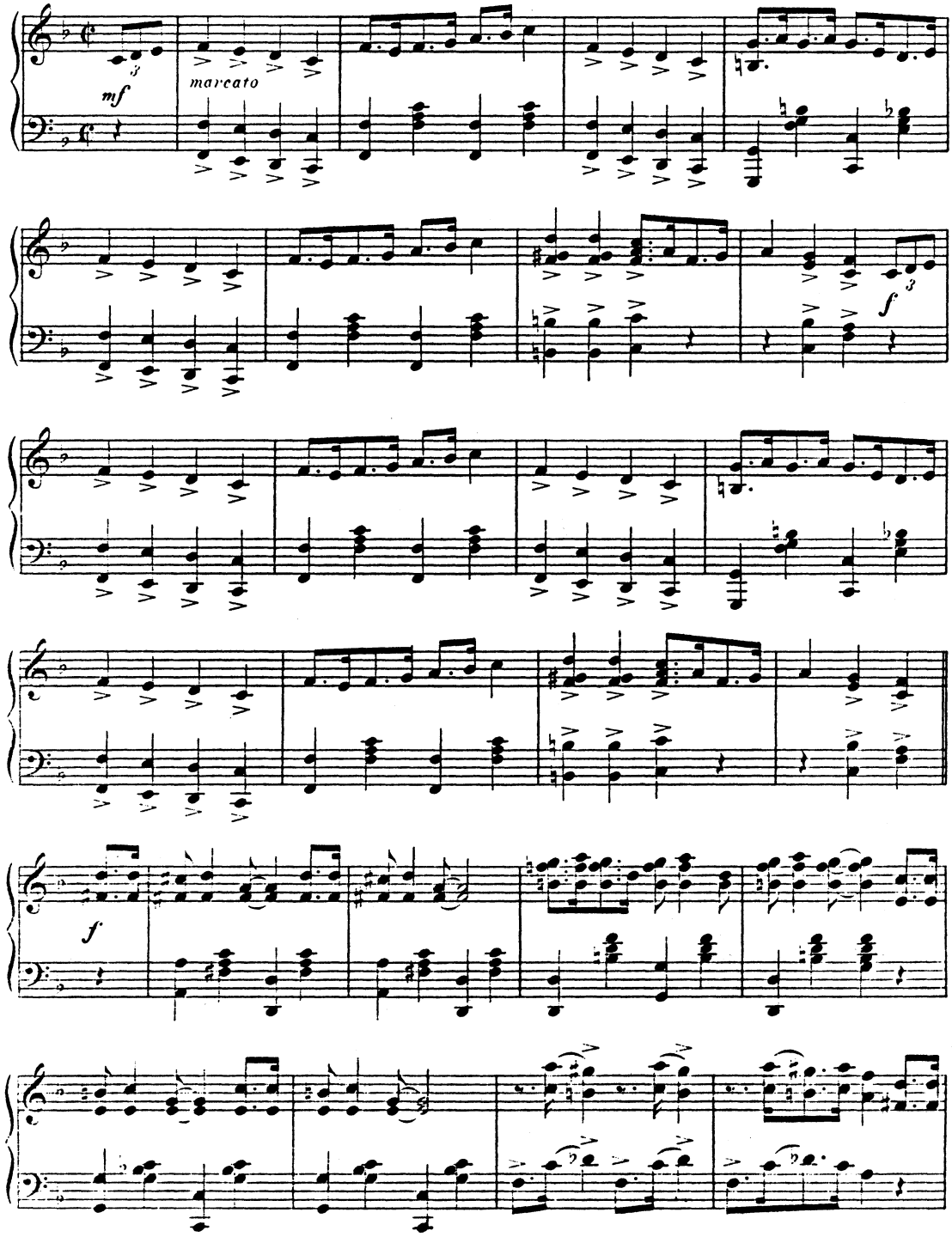
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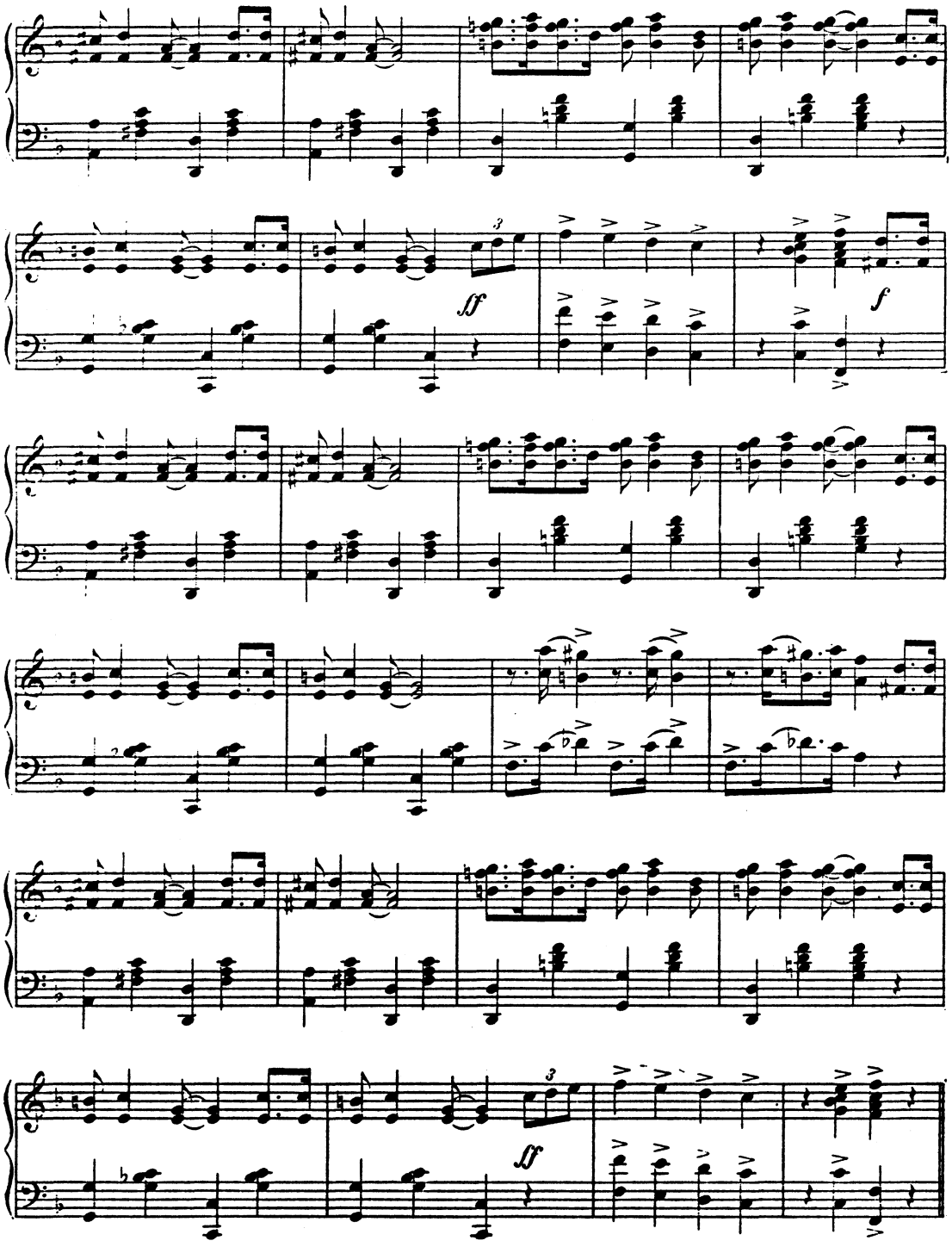
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SAM FOX TROT

RAG TWO-STEP

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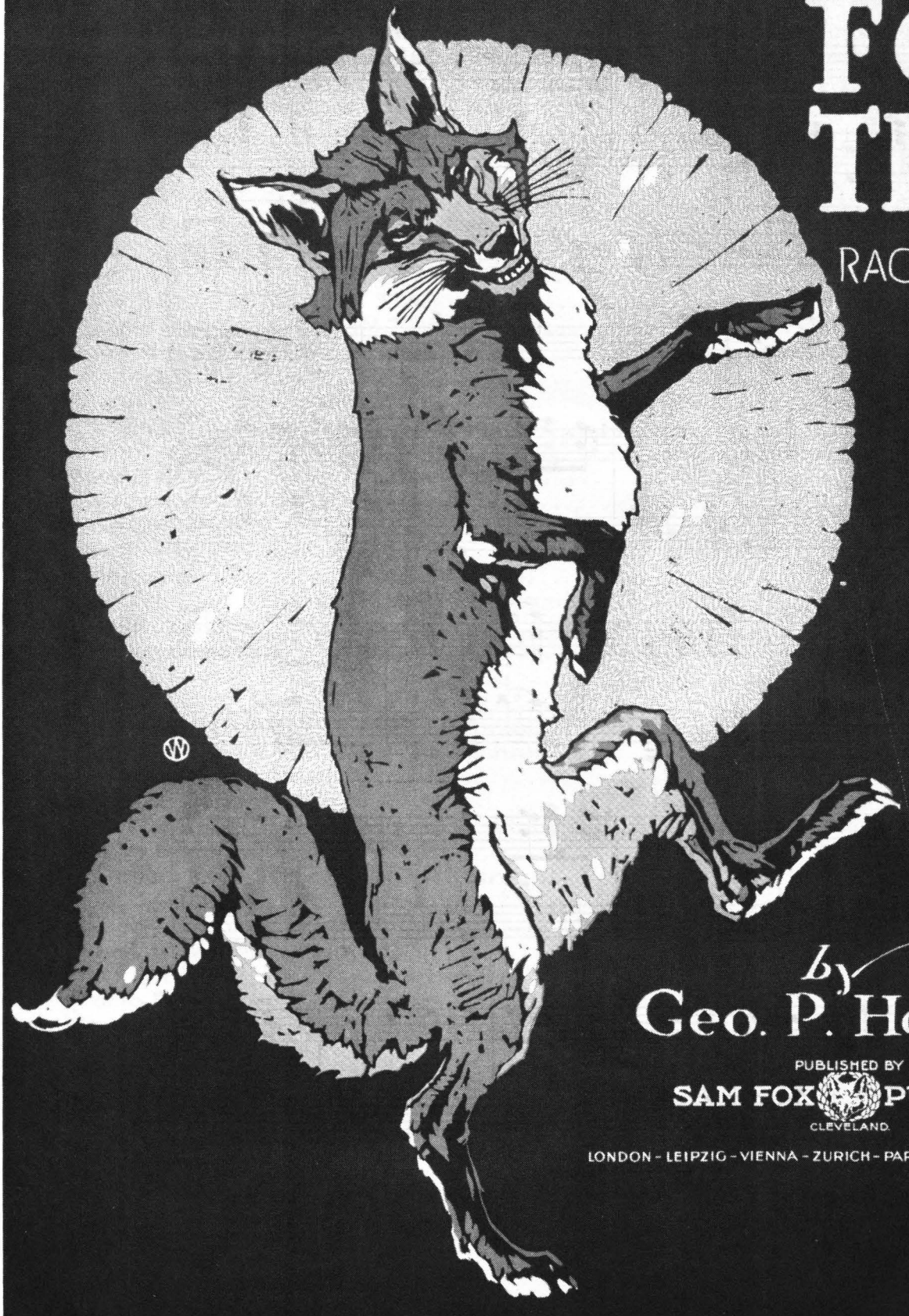

by

Geo. P. Howard.

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